

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8229
INFO AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY RABAT
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GERMANY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 0893

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, AG
SUBJECT: UNREST IN ALGERIA

REF: ALGIERS 793 NOTAL

1. PAST WEEK OR SO HAS PRODUCED NUMBER OF RUMORS OF UNREST IN ALGERIA. AS USUAL, AREAS OF AGREEMENT AS TO WHAT, IF ANYTHING, HAS BEEN GOING ON, ARE FEW. FOLLOWING IS OUR BEST ESTIMATE OF SITUATION.
 2. LAWLESSNESS IN SAIDA: ALL OUR SOURCES BELIEVE THERE WAS SOME SORT OF DISORDER IN TOWN OF SAIDA IN WESTERN ALGERIA AT END OF FEBRUARY. INCIDENT ALMOST CERTAINLY INVOLVED SOME SORT OF ARMED ATTACK ON A SECURITY FORCES POST, EITHER POLICE OR GENDARMERIE, AND ATTACKERS GENERALLY BELIEVED TO HAVE SEIZED ARMS DURING RAID. MOST PRECISE FIGURE FOR WAPONS TAKEN IS 30. THIS COMES FROM POLICE OR ARMY OPERATIVE WHO SEARCHED VEHICLE OF
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EXPATRIATE SOURCE IN SAIDA REGION AT TIME OF RAID. WE HAVE NO RELIABLE CASUALTY ESTIMATES. AS SUGGESTED ALGIERS 793, OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF LAW FORBIDDING USE OF MILITARY UNIFORM AND EQUIPMENT BY CIVILIANS INDICATES POSSIBLE REGIME CONCERN THAT UNIFORMS BEING USED BY PREPETRATORS OF INCIDENTS TO GAIN ACCESS TO MILITARY INSTALLATIONS.

3. PUBLIC GOA REACTION WAS TO TIGHTEN POLICE CONTROLS ON INTERNAL AIR ALGERIE FLIGHTS DURING EARLY PART OF MARCH. A POLICE OFFICIAL IN ORAN TOLD AIR ALGERIE CUSTOMER IN EMBOFF'S HEARING THAT AIRPORT SECURITY INCREASED BECAUSE "SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED." WE HAVE HAD LITTLE REPORTING ON WHAT SORT OF SECURITY MEASURES MAY BE IN EFFECT ON ROADS.

4. SECOND INCIDENT THAT EVIDENTLY CAUSED REGIME CONCERN WAS DEMONSTRATION WHICH TOOK PLACE MARCH 9 WHEN BODY OF EX-COUNCIL OF REVOLUTION MEMBER KAID AHMED WAS RETURNED FROM MOROCCO TO HIS NATIVE TOWN OF TIARET IN WESTERN ALGERIA. ACCORDING TO LE MONDE, 10,000 PEOPLE TURNED OUT FOR BODY'S ARRIVAL, AND ALTHOUGH THERE WAS APPARENTLY NO VIOLENCE, CROWD IS SAID TO HAVE BEEN HOSTILE TO REGIME.

5. BEYOND THIS, THERE ARE MORE SPECULATIVE REPORTS. WEST GERMAN EMBASSY, CITING SOURCE WITH GOOD SECURITY FORCE CONTACTS, CLAIMS THAT ATTACK ON SAIDA GENDARMERIE POST WAS FOLLOWED BY ATTACK ON LOCAL BANK. WEST GERMANS HAVE ALSO HEARD FROM SAME SOURCE THAT THERE HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF DESERTIONS IN SECOND AND THIRD MILITARY REGIONS IN WEST AND SOUTHWEST. FINALLY, WEST GERMANS' SOURCE CLAIMS THAT LARGE QUANTITIES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT WERE RECENTLY BEING SOLD IN ORAN BLACK
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MARKET.

6. LABOR DIFFICULTIES: THERE ARE ALSO REMORS OF WORK STOPPAGES IN VARIOUS ENTERPRISES AROUND COUNTRY. ONLY SPECIFIC INFORMATION WE HAVE IS THAT ALGIERS GARBAGEMEN HAVE STAGED A NUMBER OF WILDCAT STRIKES OVER PAST SIX WEEKS TO TWO MONTHS AND THAT THERE HAS BEEN FURTHER TROUBLE AT ALGIERS PORT. OTHER REPORTS, RANGING FROM STRIKE AND SUBSEQUENT DISMISSAL OF 1600 WORKERS AT A STATE CONSTRUCTION ENTERPRISE IN BEJAIA TO TO WALKOUTS IN TWO ALGIERS CEMENT PLANTS STILL UNCONFIRMED. HOWEVER, ALL SOURCES BELIEVE THAT WAGE INCREASES PROMISED FOR JANUARY 1 HAVE NOT BEEN PAID, AND THIS FAILURE COULD REASONABLY BE EXPECTED TO CAUSE LABOR TROUBLES.

7. COMMENT: FOREGOING REPRESENTS LARGEST SPATE OF RUMORS OF UNREST THAT WE CAN RECALL HEARING IN SHORT SPACE OF TIME DURING LAST TWO YEARS. ALTHOUGH WE TAKE EACH REPORT WITH GRAIN OF SALT, WE NEVERTHELESS BELIEVE THAT LEVEL OF UNREST HAS INCREASED IN RECENT WEEKS. AT MOMENT, WE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT COUNTRY MAY BE ENTERING ONE OF ITS MORE OR LESS ANNUAL PERIODS OF

UNEASE, CAUSED LARGELY BY INFLATION AND LOW QUALITY
OF LIFE. NEVERTHELESS, REPORTS OF DISSIDENCE ARE
MORE NUMEROUS THAN USUAL. TIME SHOULD TELL WHETHER
THEY ARE VARIATIONS ON SAIDA INCIDENT THEME OR WHETHER
TROUBLE HAS BEEN MORE WIDESPREAD.STEPHAN

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